CSO Monitoring Guidance:
Data to Inform

Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

Anticipating, Preventing, & Responding to Conflict


CSO Monitoring Guidance:
Data to Inform

Contents

Part I: Monitoring Overview

Monitoring and Why it Matters

Monitoring is the collection of real-time information to inform programmatic decisions.[1] It is an important part of programming because it is what allows us to responsibly manage our programs, adjusting course as necessary to maximize our impact on the ground. Through monitoring, we also begin to identify what did or did not change and to think critically about what enabled/prohibited that, which lets us make smarter choices in the future. Given the relatively limited evidence base in the stabilization and peacebuilding fields for what works, investing in conflict program monitoring is particularly important.

Monitoring as Management, Not Bean Counting

In 2006, Search for Common Ground published *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Activities*[2] by Cheyanne Church and Mark Rogers. They observe that "much of the challenge in monitoring involves connecting relevant information to strategic decisions." Over a decade later, it is a challenge we still face.

Connecting monitoring and decisions requires us to identify the decisions we will need to make so we can gather and analyze relevant information in time to feed into decision making processes. Ultimately, the decisions are program-specific but are usually variations on the question: should we keep doing what we have done as planned or should we change? Answering that question typically requires context, implementation, and results monitoring (see below). Since gathering useful information takes resources, it is important not to waste any on bean counting – gathering data that provides numbers but has no clear link to decision making. If you cannot see a potential use for monitoring information, please do not collect it.

Types of Monitoring Data

There are three types of monitoring data you need to inform daily program management decisions. In addition, some programs may wish to collect information to monitor the fundamental assumptions embedded within their theories of change (TOC). Each is described below:

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[1] For information on monitoring versus evaluation, see the Types of Monitoring Data section, as well as the evaluation entry in the glossary.

[2] Available at: http://www.dmeforpeace.org/learn/online-field-guide/managing-and-implementing-an-evaluation/need-throughout-evaluation-process-manage-evaluation/evaluators-project-team/church-cheyanne-mark-rogers-evaluation-management-designing-results-integrating-monitoring-evaluation-conflict-transformation-programs-137-177-washington-dc-search-c/

- *Context monitoring (required)*: You designed your program in response to the particulars of a context at a given point in time. The context is ever-evolving and, like the proverbial frog in hot water, it can be difficult in the midst of implementation to recognize when the environment has shifted so much that the program design might no longer be the right fit. The purpose of identifying contextual assumptions, factors directly pertinent to the program that must stay the same for the program's logic to remain valid, is to think through the sort of changes that should trigger a re-examination of the program.

- *Implementation monitoring (required)*: This tracks if you are on time, on budget, and doing your job well. Two aspects of whether you are doing your job well include targets and performance standards. Participant targets are the characteristics of those you must engage in the program for the desired changes to unfold, e.g. profession, gender, ethnicity. Targets also apply to outputs activities must produce to achieve that change. Performance standards articulate what constitutes high quality work in connection with particular activities, e.g., dialogue or messaging to counter dangerous speech.

- *Results monitoring (required)*: This tracks progress toward the program's objectives and goal[3], also known as desired changes. In addition to tracking progress toward desired changes, you should track unintended results, particularly connected to sensitive parts of the program where the chance of causing inadvertent harm is highest.

- *Fundamental assumptions monitoring (optional)*[4]: All TOCs are built on assumptions about how change will unfold. Often these are unstated rationales explaining the links between activities and/or objectives. For example, a program might conduct activities designed to engage a large number of people based on an assumption key change agents need to feel part of a broad group before they will feel comfortable taking action. Implementation monitoring tracks if large numbers of people are, in fact, participating in the activities. Results monitoring tracks whether they are taking the desired action. Fundamental assumption monitoring tracks if there is evidence the rationale was right – was feeling part of a broad group key to people's decision to take action? Normally, such questions would be addressed through evaluation but certain cases, we may decide to build this into how we monitor. See Section VIII for more detail.

[3] Monitoring of a program's goal can also be called impact monitoring.
[4] Another name for this is grand theory of change.

Part II: Monitoring Plan Template Instructions

When a program launches, CSO asks you, our implementing partners, to develop a monitoring plan inclusive of your work and that of any sub-implementing partners and to revise it as needed. A monitoring plan is just that – it lays out how you intend to gather, analyze, and – most importantly – use monitoring data.

Below are instructions for how to complete each section of the monitoring plan, including examples of what *useful* and not useful monitoring plans look like. We strongly encourage you to communicate with CSO as you work on the draft to determine together what is most important to monitor. Let us know, for example, which activities and results you propose monitoring and why, before you complete the detailed information for each. Subsequently, you can develop indicators and a data collection plan to best capture what you intend to monitor.

Section I: Grant Information

You can pull most of this section from existing documents, updating as necessary. For example, if you refined the program goal and/or objectives since the proposal, note that in the "current goal/objectives" section.

One likely area requiring updating is the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) budget. Your grant proposal included an estimate, but as you develop the monitoring plan, you should update this estimate to reflect actual monitoring activities in your plan. CSO does not require implementing partners to conduct evaluations; we will conduct external evaluations on select programs using separate CSO funds. If you would like to do your own internal evaluation, please discuss with CSO before including it on your monitoring plan and budget.

The cost of your monitoring plan will vary depending on the size of the program and how complex the required monitoring is. While many organizations recommend M&E represent three-to-five percent of the total program budget, the most important guideline is: develop a budget that enables your monitoring plan. (Note: that amount only includes M&E activities, such as baseline collection and monitoring travel. Salaries for dedicated M&E staff should also be included in your budget but are in addition to the recommended three-to-five percent cost.) If the updated M&E budget differs from the original proposal budget, contact CSO to discuss whether to reallocate, or potentially increase, funding, adjust the monitoring plan, or take other action.

A second point in this section worth explanation is the request for both an M&E point of contact (POC) and a field team M&E POC. We understand many organizations develop monitoring plans at headquarters, but want to ensure that the field team has provided input/signed off on the feasibility of the plan. For this reason, please identify both headquarter-based and field-based staff working on the monitoring plan. If the field team drafts the monitoring plan, put "N/A" in the "Implementing Partner M&E POC" box.

Finally, in the section for standing communication mechanisms, please note the regular communication channels you plan to maintain with CSO, besides the mandatory quarterly reports, which are explained below. For example, you and CSO might have agreed to regular email updates or standing phone calls. Capture those here to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Section II: Monitoring Plan Review

Most peacebuilding programs evolve over time, requiring adaptations to both program designs and monitoring plans. For example, adding a program phase may require new objectives. This might create the need for new indicators, which a revised monitoring plan would capture. Or you may realize that tracking the political affiliations of participants in an activity is not nuanced enough to help you recruit those who really need to participate. An updated plan could also track participant's age or region.

For this reason, we ask that you update your monitoring plan as needed, and at a minimum, we require you to review it once a quarter to ensure it still matches the program's monitoring needs. (See the Quarterly Monitoring Report Template Instructions, Section VII on page 27 of this guide for more details on reviewing your monitoring plan.) Work with your CSO representative to develop a list of quarterly report due dates so you can plan your monitoring review accordingly.

Section III: Decisions Monitoring Supports

To help ensure monitoring supports smart programming decisions, we put those decisions at the center of our monitoring plan. For this section, please identify the core decisions you believe the program manager will have to make during the program to achieve objectives.

As noted above, these are usually variations on the question, should we keep doing what we have been doing in the way we have been doing it? Program managers will need to make decisions such as, do we need to increase our activity's outputs to reach our target outcomes? Do we need to add activities to catalyze changes in a new sub-objective we realize is part of achieving a broader change? Are we engaging the right people?

As your program advances, you will likely refine the decisions you want monitoring to support, which is fine. As a first step, to identify the right questions for your program, start with your TOC. To know if you should keep doing what you have been doing, first you will need to know if the TOC is still relevant to the context. If not, the program needs to adapt. Second, you need to know if you are achieving the desired results articulated in each link within the TOC, and if not, why.

Common reasons a TOC might not be unfolding as expected are[5]:

- The TOC is missing some of the necessary and sufficient lower-order changes to enable achieving objectives;
- The activities do not produce sufficient outputs;
- The activities are not the right strategy to bring about the desired changes;
- The activities are not engaging the right people to achieve the desired changes; and/or
- The program has insufficient resources to catalyze the degree of change sought.

As you think about where to invest monitoring resources, think about the information you will need to decide whether to keep following the original plan, i.e., results and insight into why you are/are not achieving the desired results so you can adapt (when necessary). Enter these questions in Section III: Decisions Monitoring Supports. Please discuss these decisions with CSO prior to submitting a complete monitoring plan draft to ensure early agreement on the monitoring approach.

Section IV: Context Monitoring

To complete the table in this section, identify the contextual factors[6] you need to monitor and how you will do so. Contextual factors should be those in the external environment that, if they changed, the program's fundamental logic might need to shift. In other words, what is true about the operating environment at the start of the program that needs to remain true for the program to unfold as planned? This could relate to security conditions remaining such that the program can operate, the role of key program interlocutors, or dates for key political events related to the program, such as an election. Do not include changes the program seeks to create in this section – those belong in the results section. When addressing how you will monitor these factors in the "Means of Monitoring" section, describe the types of evidence you will use to determine if any factors have changed, who will collect the data, and how you will analyze it.

Note that contextual factors can influence the program at operational or strategic levels. For example, if battle lines shifted and it were no longer safe for participants to travel to a particular training location, that would have operational implications, i.e., relocating the training site. If a program's logic depended on a key interlocutor remaining in a position of power and that were to change, that could influence the program at strategic levels.

[5] The inverse is also true – this list of issues, done well, often explains successful outcomes.
[6] Another name for this is contextual assumption.

Illustrative Examples for Completing Section IV of the Monitoring Plan: Context Monitoring

Here are some examples of what we are looking for in this section:

Example 1:

Factors in Context to Monitor	Means of Monitoring
Most community members get their news from Radio Libre. *(Hypothetical peace messaging program in small community.)*	*NGO Peace Now will monitor this by asking a randomly-selected group of market venders, taxi drivers, and community meeting participants where they get most of their news and if their friends and family are the same. Peace Now will tally how many people report getting news from each, disaggregating responses by gender and tribe. Peace Now's in-country program officer will gather this information quarterly. Based on prior polling, we know over 80 percent of the community currently relies on Radio Libre. If half or more of our respondents indicate they/their families get most of their news from another source, that could be a signal of a significant change and we would speak with additional people to confirm if a large shift is occurring.*

Explanation: *A shift in where community members get their information might mean the NGO needs to consider disseminating program messages in multiple ways.*

Important elements of the means by which the NGO plans to monitor this include:

- *They selected the simplest possible way to gather 'good enough' data. It is a small community and they need to have a general sense for where people get information, not an exact answer. So no need for a formal survey! (Note: we did not include the number of people with whom they would speak because adding the detail to make the number meaningful is beyond the scope of this brief example. Select the number that will give you a general sense and plan to dig deeper if that first look suggests trends are changing.)*
- *They included who would collect data and how often.*
- *They explained how they would analyze their results: what they would tally and how they would disaggregate.*
- *They were also clear about the threshold for when they would question their assumption that most people get their news from Radio Libre and investigate further. (Note: this goes beyond how they will analyze to how they will draw conclusions about what the data means.)*

Example 2:

Factors in Context to Monitor	**Means of Monitoring**
The parties agree that the following acts constitute ceasefire violations: airstrikes, ground attacks, and fortifying military positions. *(Hypothetical program to train ceasefire monitors)*	*The Williams Center will track ongoing negotiations by speaking with the mediation team weekly and read any new ceasefire agreements. We will list any new activities (e.g., recruitment) a revised ceasefire prohibits.*

Explanation: *If ceasefire terms changed, that would require* updating the training *the Williams Center provides the monitors.*

As in the above example, the monitoring approach uses the simplest means possible to get the necessary information and specifies who will collect it, with what frequency, and how Williams will analyze the information it collects.

Here are some examples of what we are *not* looking for in this section:

Example 1:

Factors in Context to Monitor	**Means of Monitoring**
Police support the formation of dispute resolution committees. *(Hypothetical dispute resolution program in a country where there is significant informal support for creating the committees but that does not yet extend to the police. Building police support is a program objective.)*	*NGO Peace Now will conduct periodic horizon scanning.*

Explanation: *Many people conflate key changes their program will need to create early with contextual assumptions. A contextual assumption is true at the start of the program and must remain true for the logic to hold.*

The means of monitoring does not explain the evidence Peace Now will use to assess elite support, how often they will collect it, or what will constitute a significant shift.

Example 2:

Factors in Context to Monitor	**Means of Monitoring**
The war does not resume. *(Hypothetical countering violent extremism program in a region with a three-year old peace agreement.)*	*We will read the newspapers.*

Explanation: *Though it is true this contextual assumption would impact the program, it likely means total program suspension, not something to which the program manager could adapt. It is, therefore, not a useful form of monitoring data to collect.*

Section V: Implementation Monitoring

There are many types of implementation information one could collect. To prioritize the collection of useful information, revisit Section III: Decisions Monitoring Supports and focus on those. For example, if you are piloting a training in one community before expanding to all programming sites and one of your key management decisions is what to adjust and what to maintain when taking the training to scale, you might focus on gathering data that will let you know if training costs stayed within the budget, whether the training was able to attract participation from its target audience, and if trainers adhered to good performance standards in how they conducted the training.

You should have already submitted a work plan and a budget to CSO. If, however, in the process of developing your monitoring plan, your budget and/or work plan changes, please send us an updated copy along with your monitoring plan.

The work plan should list all program activities. You will not be able to monitor every aspect of how you implement each activity. That's okay! Decide which to monitor which will inform how you complete the implementation section of the monitoring plan. There are a few standard reasons, discussed below, you might decide merit particular attention – but much of this will come down to the logic of your program and what information you need to manage it. Please limit the number of activities for which you conduct implementation monitoring to those you most need to track for decision-making purposes. Investing in gathering and analyzing credible information for a few key activities is more useful than bean-counting across the board. Again, we recommend you discuss those activities you plan to monitor and why you chose them with CSO prior to submitting a draft monitoring plan to ensure agreement.

Potential Reasons to Select Activities for Implementation Monitoring:

- Complex timeline: Certain activities will need to be completed before others and there are enough moving and interrelated pieces that you want to be systematic in how you track the different components.

- Repeated activity: You plan to do the same sort of activity multiple times so paying close attention to implementation details the first time might help improve the effectiveness or efficiency of later iterations of the activity.

- Dosage/intended outputs: We often know we need to do a certain amount of something but do not know exactly how much that is. We are not sure how many training events it will take for participants to learn a new skill, how often people need to hear a public message before it influences their views, or how many people need to participate in an activity for the desired change to occur at group vice individual levels. Tracking dosage can help us understand why change did or did not occur. Capture it as part of the intended outputs in the below chart. Note: please include the quarter by which you expect to achieve the intended outputs.

- ‘Right’ Participants: Activities will not catalyze their desired changes if the wrong people participate. Who is ‘right’ will depend on the activity but could be about identity groups, professions, or leadership level. Tracking who participates can also help us understand why change did or did not occur. Capture this in the Participant Target column.

- Clarity on ‘Good’ Work: It is not enough to do something. To make a lasting difference, we need to do it well. For instance, some mentoring relationships lead to increased mentee skills and some do not. Though that depends on multiple factors, one is how well the mentor mentored. Performance standards explicitly outline what constitutes good mentoring. This can reference external research findings and/or internal policy or experience. Articulating performance standards can be particularly worthwhile in two circumstances. First, when there is existing evidence about what makes certain activities effective, establishing performance standards help integrate good practice into programming. Second, when there is a good chance different people involved have different visions for what an activity will entail, articulating performance standards and using them to monitor can build consensus around what success looks like. Be explicit about your source for what constitutes quality work (e.g., evidence from academia or policies of your organization).

After selecting activities in your work plan to monitor, complete the chart in Section V of the Monitoring Plan Template. Provide a brief rationale for why each activity merits implementation monitoring. Since you will not monitor all activity implementation, it is important to be deliberate in where you choose to invest monitoring resources. These explanations also help clarify which kind of implementation monitoring is useful. For example, if you want to be sure the right people are engaged, tracking intended and actual participants will be key. If, on the other hand, your rationale for monitoring focused on the quality of the work, the performance standard section would be most relevant.

Based on your rationale for monitoring, complete those of the remaining columns that are relevant. It is not necessary to complete all columns for each activity listed. If you selected an activity to monitor strictly because you wanted to use performance standards to facilitate conversations within your staff, write the performance standards you will use in the table and mark the intended output and intended target group columns “N/A.”

Illustrative Examples for Completing Section V of the Monitoring Plan: Implementation Monitoring

Here are some examples of what we are looking for in this section:

Example 1:

Activity	Rationale for Monitoring	Intended Quarterly Output & Explanation	Participant Target	Performance Standard & Source
Media training	*In this media market, the decision about which stories to run and how to portray them is made entirely by editors with no input from journalists. If we want to change how press covers the conflict, we need to reach editors. There are fifteen daily newspapers and weekly news journals that form the majority of the market.*	*Seven participants complete the three-day media training in Quarter 2.* *Peace Now estimates seven editors would be sufficient to achieve the desired result because that likely is enough of the total pool to create a new norm for conflict coverage.*	*Newspaper editors*	*N?A*

Explanation: *In this example, the NGO might be focused on who attends trainings because having the wrong people in past trainings limited their impact. Including this type of monitoring might be a way to put past learning into practice.*

They are not sure how many editors they need to train to meet their objective – a question they have also faced in the past. To help with future learning, Peace Now is guessing approximately half the editor pool will be sufficient and will focus monitoring resources on this question.

They were also specific about what constitutes being trained, noting it is the number of editors who completed *the training. Sometimes it will be easy to articulate the desired output. In other cases it will require additional explanation, which you can provide in a definition section following the desired output.*

Example 2:

Activity	**Rationale for Monitoring**	**Intended Quarterly Output & Explanation**	**Intended Target Group (category)**	**Performance Standard & Source**
Election coordination cells draft strategies	*Academics and evaluators have generated good insights into what makes for effective election violence prevention strategies. That knowledge has not consistently transferred into program implementation.*	*N/A*	*N/A*	*Effective election violence prevention strategies:* *-- Marshall the resources of all actors involved in assessing and responding to electoral violence so the appropriate actors respond;* *-- Address threats before, during, and after the election; and* *-- Clarify who decides how to respond to a threat.* *Source: Hypothetical Journal of Elections Violence.*

Explanation: *Distilling literature down to accessible points both ensures clear donor-implementer communication and can be used in program materials to support the election coordination cells' work.*

Peace Now also included the source(s) for the standards. If there is a disagreement about what standards to use, this helps keep that disagreement evidence based

Here is an example of what we are *not* looking for in this section:

Activity	Rationale for Monitoring	Intended Output Indicator & Explanation	Baseline & Target	Performance Standard & Source
Media training	*Implementation*	*50 media professionals*	*Youth*	*N/A*

Explanation: "*Implementation" does not provide enough insight into why the NGO selected this activity for implementation monitoring so it is unclear which other boxes should be complete.*

There is no explanation for why 50 is the right number of people to target for training completion or when they are intended to complete the training.

It is unclear if the training is intended to create change among "media professionals" and/or "youth".

Using the above scenario, the group we need in the training is editors, so media professionals is too broad and youth would likely be the wrong target group. Even if some segment of youth would be an appropriate target, it is too broad and undefined a concept to be helpful listing as a target

Section VI: Results Monitoring

Continuing our focus on collecting limited, but useful monitoring data, we ask you to consider which outcomes merit monitoring. Again, those should relate directly to the program management decisions monitoring supports. Only include outcomes in this section; monitoring of outputs should be part of implementation monitoring. Monitoring high-level outcomes help us to know if the program has had the impact on the conflict it sought. Measuring subordinate outcomes is important when they are necessary precursors and the program should not proceed to the next level until they have been met. There may be other reasons for monitoring certain outcomes but not others, which is fine. Please explain them in the table.

Quality results monitoring often hinges on indicators. In some cases, you may need to track multiple indicators to fully understand if you are progressing toward the desired change. In these cases, a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators is often the most useful.

Good indicators are SMART:

- **S**pecific: include the degree of change within the target population that will signal achieving the objective. For example, can we say trainees have learned a concept when they answer 60 percent of questions accurately or 80 percent? If the program plans to conduct a baseline and will then set the target following the baseline, that is great! If the monitoring plan is due before then, just use "TBD" in the indicator and note the date by which you will set the target.

- **M**easurable: there is only one change in the indicator and it is feasible to collect data on this factor in a reasonable amount of time and cost-effective manner. For instance, if the indicator calls for a nation-wide survey, but that is not an option for the program, such an indicator would not be measureable.

- **A**ccurate: the indicator is a direct signal of change in the context where you will use it. Picking easily-measureable indicators that do not actually tell us if the desired change has occurred is one of the most common indicator challenges we see. For example, if we want to know if trainees have learned a new skill, asking them to self-assess their level of knowledge would be an inaccurate indicator. Some indicators might not be accurate by themselves but are accurate when used in combination with other indicators. That is fine.

- **R**eliable: different people would all draw a similar conclusion through data collection and/or interpretation of the language. This often comes down to defining your terms: how old are "youth"? What does it mean to track the percentage of participants who "implement training concepts"? As noted above, some definitions fit neatly into indicators and some require more extensive explanation. In the latter case, include an indicator definition along with the indicator itself.

- **T**ime-bound: include the timeframe by which the desired outcome is sought. For longer-term changes, consider how you will track progress along the way. For example, you may wish to use multiple variations of an indicator, reflecting different targets or time-frame.

Note: Sometime useful monitoring data will present itself outside the structure of an indicator. This could be a particularly illustrative description of a participant's experience, for example, or an anecdote related to a desired change you decided not to track comprehensively. The Quarterly Report Template has a place to capture this other information. You do not need to incorporate it into your monitoring plan.

Here are a couple examples of the types of tracking we are looking for in this section:

Illustrative Example for Completing Section VI of the Monitoring Plan: Results Monitoring

Desired Outcome	Indicator
The mediation team is capable (has the knowledge and skills) of creating a mediation strategy.	*By June 2017, four out of five mediation team members can list all the steps in developing a mediation strategy. For mediation strategy steps, see Peace Now Training Handout 1.*

Explanation: *The indicator is specific, measurable, accurate, and time-bound. The specification on what counts as the right answer for mediation strategy steps makes it reliable too.*

Note: though accurate, this is an example of an indicator that does not tell the full story. Because the outcome defines capacity to include both knowledge and skills, it would be important to have an additional indicator measuring change in skill.

Here's an example of what we are *not* looking for in this section:

Outcome (Q1 & Q2)	Indicator
The mediation team is capable (has the knowledge and skills) of creating a mediation strategy.	*# of mediation team members who describe training as beneficial.*

Explanation: *This indicator is not specific (there's no degree of change), accurate (saying a training is beneficial is not the same as being knowledgeable and skilled), or time-bound (there's no date by which this is to have occurred).*

The next component in this section is the table with the details on the when, who, and how of data collection. Below is an explanation of what we mean for each field:

Indicator: *Write the indicator for which you are completing each table here. Remember: complete one table per indicator!* **(Goal/objective:** *Indicators track progress toward a particular goal or objective. State the goal/objective associated with the indicator in question.)*	
What is the data collection method?	*How are you going to get the information to measure the indicator? Common examples include: direct observation, interviews, surveys, and testing. Participatory methods or data collection that is integrated into program activities are also acceptable.*
Into what categories will you disaggregate the data?	*Into what components will you separate the data you gather? This will depend on what information is useful to track in your particular context. Common categories to consider include: religious and/or ethnic identity, residency, political affiliation, gender, age, profession, and/or rank. More categories mean more work so, please, only select the essential ones.*
What is the data source?	*Where will you get the data? Examples could include training participants, newspapers, or election commission strategy documents.*
If appropriate, what is the location of the data source?	*Where is the data source? This question is primarily aimed at encouraging planning ahead for any necessary travel.*
If appropriate, what sampling means will you use?	*How will you pick from whom within the entire client base to collect data? Common options are: random sampling (selecting a representative sample of a population to be able to generalize); purposeful sampling (sample based on a particular characteristic of the population that is of interest); comprehensive selection (in which data is collected from all of the population in question); or emergent (in which you decide about sampling decisions as you learn more about the setting).*
How will you store the data and for how long?	*We ask about data storage for two reasons. The first is security: what steps do you need to take, given your particular context, to protect those providing data? For example, where will the data be stored, how secure is that, who will have access to it, and when will you delete it? The second is for future evaluations: what should evaluators expect to find? Ideally, the program will store both summaries from data collection and the raw data. If that will not be possible, note that.*
Who will collect the data?	*Will this be a member(s) of the implementing team? A sub-implementing partner? Other? It is fine for the data collector and analyzer to be the same person.*
When will s/he collect the	*We ask about this both so we know when to expect information and*

data? Include approximate dates for the baseline and subsequent measurement.	*as a means for facilitating discussion about what timeline the measurement must meet to be useful. Often the baseline will be part of determining program targets, so will need to be completed before programming begins.*
How will you analyze the data?	*How will you make sense of the information you collected? For example, if you are analyzing quantitative data that ranks how much respondents trust members of another group on a scale from one to five, you might count how many people ranked their trust at each level, identify trust levels by mean, median, and mode, and disaggregate the data by relevant sub-groupings. If you are analyzing qualitative data about how trust/distrust manifests in the workplace, you might code the responses for certain themes and then look for patterns.*
Who will analyze the data?	*Will this be a member(s) of the implementing team? A sub-implementing partner? Other?*
Who will communicate analysis of the data to decision makers?	*There could be up to three answers to this question:* *1. Who, within the implementing organization, will communicate information internally to support your organization's decision making?* *2. Who, within the implementing organization, will communicate information to CSO? and* *3. Who, within CSO, will communicate information to CSO decision makers?* *You are welcome to share the answer to #1 with CSO or maintain that information internally. Please provide the answer to #2; CSO will give you the answer to #3.*
When?	*We ask this to facilitate planning – look at the dates associated with the decisions you have listed and this date here. Will that work? Remember – the purpose is to enable program managers to make informed decisions. That means they need that information in time to incorporate it into their decisions.*
How will you communicate the monitoring information to CSO?	*We assume you will communicate the majority of time-sensitive information in email or by phone and the rest will go in the quarterly report. As such, we've provided the below language. You may update it, if necessary.* *We will communicate information via the quarterly reports except when the results are time-sensitive, in which case we will communicate that via email.*

Finally, please indicate the date(s) by which you will submit your data collection tool(s) (e.g., survey questions) to CSO.

We recognize this requests a significant amount of information for each indicator and is part of our track-less-but-track-it-well approach. We encourage you to only track the most essential changes your program seeks to create. The exact number will vary by program but could be as small as one to three changes. Be realistic about the resources proper monitoring requires and do not hesitate to propose tracking less!

Section VII: Monitoring for Unintentional Results

In addition to those results we intend to catalyze, programs can lead to unintentional results. Your proposal identified ways in which program activities might cause inadvertent harm, as well as way to mitigate that. In the monitoring plan, identify how you will track what, if any, unintentional harm is resulting from the program. As in previous sections, attempting to monitor for every possible unintended result would be impractical. Pick those areas where the risk of harm is greatest. Consider the scenarios on the next page as examples:

Scenario	Area for Monitoring
If your program will invest significant resources in a limited economy…	*How do the identity groups of those you hire and serve break down along conflict lines?* *What, if any, impact is the investment having on local and informal markets?*
If your program will promote a certain group of people into leadership roles…	*How are they using that new-found power?* *How are traditional leaders responding to this new group's role? (For example, if a program promotes women in a decision-making role in a patriarchal society, how are men reacting?)*

Scenario	**Area for Monitoring**
If your program involves some degree of risk for participants…	*How is that risk manifesting?* *Note: Those living in conflict are usually best-placed to assess the risk they undertake by participating in a given program. Understanding that risk, however, might enable program adjustments to better mitigate it. For example, programs that bring together groups from divided communities without prior contact can pose risks. In certain circumstances risk can be mitigated by addressing contentious issues in separate group discussions first and then proceeding with the cross-community work.*
If your program includes equipment/resources that could be diverted to support violence…	*Is equipment missing/stolen?*
If your program introduces a new solution to a particular problem (e.g. wells in town)…	*What are beneficiaries' holistic experiences of the solution (e.g., the wells improve women's security but deprive them of the only social contact they had with each other)?* *Has the new solution displaced any local systems or institutions?*

Though the focus of this section is on monitoring unintended results for do-no-harm purposes, you may also include other areas in which you will conduct broader results monitoring. For example, if you are conducting a truly innovative activity for which there is no evidence base on its effects, you may wish to monitor for both positive and negative results. In other words, in addition to monitoring for harmful unintended results, you may wish to establish a monitoring system that tracks whether there were any results the program had not intentionally sought to bring about but recognizes as being beneficial.

In addition to identifying what areas you will monitor, please explain how you will approach this monitoring. For example, will you incorporate open-ended questions into standard post-training questionnaires, interview people likely to have information pertinent to the area you wish to track, and/or include this as an evaluation question in a mid-term evaluation?

Section VIII: Fundamental Assumption Monitoring

As noted above, all TOCs are built on assumptions about how change will unfold. A program might achieve its objectives without the assumptions having been accurate. There is value to the larger peacebuilding field in examining the validity of these assumptions because they can inform the logic of many different programs. Often, this is done through evaluation. If a program will not have an evaluation or is of sufficient duration and flexible implementation structures to make larger-scale adaptations during the program's life, you may wish to consider gathering monitoring data on fundamental assumptions. If a program is planning an evaluation, generally, CSO recommends against including this form of monitoring.

If you opt to monitor any of the TOC's fundamental assumptions, state them and then explain how you will monitor them. For example, if a program's fundamental assumption is that people need to feel part of a broad group before they are willing to take potentially risky action, you might ask program participants to list the reasons they did or did not take action and track the percent citing "feeling part of a broad group," disaggregated by those who did and did not take action.

Monitoring fundamental assumptions usually requires indicators. When that is the case, complete a data collection chart like the one you complete for outcome indicators. In cases where indicators are not necessary, explain why that is the case and how you will monitor these assumptions.

Wrapping Up Your Monitoring Plan

Congratulations! You have a draft. As a final check of your plan, return to Section III: Decisions Monitoring Supports and confirm that the plan would provide the information needed to make a smart choice when faced with each decision.

Once you submit a draft, CSO will review it and provide comments. Most monitoring plans go through a few iterations of comments as CSO discusses them with you. Please provide a draft monitoring plan at least three weeks ahead of the due date to enable sufficient time to finalize the monitoring plan.

Part III: Quarterly Monitoring Report Template Instructions

The quarterly monitoring report is a vehicle for analyzing monitoring information and ensuring we are feeding that learning into what we are doing on the ground. **It is not a vehicle for determining whether a program is a success or not.** We work in tough places on hard problems. That means we will miss our targets frequently. When that happens, we expect quarterly reports to include thoughtful examinations of why that occurred with an emphasis on how the program can adapt moving forward.

Each template will vary slightly, depending on your program and the specific decisions monitoring needs to support. Below is guidance on how to complete the generic template, which you can adapt with support from your CSO representative. (Note: the Quarterly Monitoring Report is exclusively for reporting progress on your monitoring plan. It is separate from your quarterly narrative and budget, which you must also submit.)

Section I: Grant Information

This should be a direct cut-and-paste from your latest monitoring plan, with one exception: if your program goal or any of the objectives are different from what they were when you completed the current monitoring plan, include the updated goal/objectives here.

Section II: Monitoring Synthesis

This is the heart of your report. After carefully gathering your monitoring information, this is where you tell us what that information tells you about decisions you may have to make about the program. The exact questions relevant for your monitoring synthesis section will depend on the decisions in Section III of your Monitoring Plan.

The synthesis of information for this section draws on the context, implementation, and results monitoring data you will report in their component parts below. In this section, please tell us if you are continuing program management as previously planned or adapting and why, drawing on monitoring information for the latter.

Section III: Context Monitoring

This section asks if the contextual assumptions remain valid, how you know that, and, if not, what implication that has for the program. If, using the means you outlined in your monitoring plan, you assess that all your contextual assumptions remain true, simply state that and summarize the evidence that led you to that conclusion in the "How You Know" column. For example:

Factor to Monitor	Still Valid?	How You Know	How Context Has Changed (if applicable)	Implication for Program (if applicable)
List of actions constituting a ceasefire violation remain unchanged	Yes	Changes to the ceasefire agreement are published. The parties did update the agreement this quarter but the change concerned how the monitors operate, not the violations they monitor.	N/A	N/A

If a contextual assumption is no longer true, or you suspect it might change in the near future, explain that. Again, summarize the information causing you to reach that conclusion. Also, specify what impact it has or will have on the program. *For example, a program working to develop the negotiation capacity of a rebel group might have a contextual assumption that particular individuals will remain on the group's negotiating team. If that changes, the program may need to repeat negotiation capacity development activities with the new negotiation team members.*

Section IV: Implementation Monitoring

The first table in this section combines reporting on timelines and target groups. You reported the dates by which you intended to complete your activities in the Excel portion of your monitoring plan (depicted in Annex III). In cases where you have ongoing activities, you may have noted milestones instead of full completion. For example, you might have completed three of 12 training sessions. For those activities you intended to complete this quarter, this section simply asks you to compare the intended implementation timeline with the actual implementation timeline.

What you will complete for the rest of this table depends on your monitoring plan. In some cases, you may have wanted to monitor an activity to check on dosage questions (i.e., whether you have "enough" of the activity with "enough" people), in which case you would report on intended and actual outputs. In other cases, you might have focused on whether you had engaged the 'right people' in the activity, which you would report in the target participants/actual participants' columns. "N/A" might be the right answer for some of these boxes!

The second table also draws from the Excel portion of the monitoring plan. Based on discussion with your GOR, you might have reported intended quarterly expenditures by line item or activity. Please now report the actual expenditures in a way that enables comparison with intended expenditures for the quarter and to date. Note: exact format may vary depending on how you break down overall spending, i.e., by line item or activity.

The third question asks you to compare an activity's actual implementation with the performance standards to which you intended it to hold. Again, this is only relevant if your monitoring plan specified performance standards. If it did, please also describe how you know the extent to which the activity adhered to its standard. For example, your program staff might have reviewed all the election security plans drafted by target communities and kept track of which ones met which standards.

After establishing what you'd planned and what actually happened through all of the above, the fourth question is the analytic one. Looking back, it asks you to reflect on what enabled individual successes or shortcomings. As previously noted, **given the complex environments in which we operate and the difficult goals we seek to accomplish, we expect our programs will frequently fall short of their targets – so, not to worry if that is what happened! We are looking for a thoughtful examination of why that occurred, with an emphasis on those factors that are in your or CSO's power to adjust in the future.** Similarly, if there were successes, we want to understand those too so we can intentionally replicate what worked in the future. (Note: you are welcome to report on what enabled successfully meeting a target, in addition to exceeding it.) Looking forward, this question asks you to think through how these implementation successes or shortcomings affect the rest of the program. Remember, as a monitoring report, this is all about informing responsible program management decisions.

Finally, if any of those individuals designated as key personnel changed, please include that information in this section of your quarterly report. Consult your GOR if you are unclear which personnel are designated as key.

Sections V: Results Monitoring

As with the implementation section, the results section asks you to report and then analyze your data. The chart asks you to include the intended outcome and SMART indicator, if applicable, from the monitoring plan. Then note: (1) the baseline; (2) the target for this quarter; (3) the target to date; (4) the outcomes achieved this quarter; and (5) the outcomes achieved since the start of the program. Finally, the "other evidence" column is one of two places in the monitoring report where you can capture information that you did not plan to track as an indicator but represents an important accomplishment. For example, if your program seeks to influence policymakers and those policymakers use information you provided them in their public remarks, you may wish to note those additional examples of influence in the "other evidence" column.

Also like above, we ask you to think critically about your monitoring results to understand what explains any discrepancies between planned and actual results and identify what impact that will have on the program, if any. Ideally, the degree of change and timeframe you establish in the indicator align with quarterly report timelines. In some cases, that might not be feasible – which you would have worked through with your CSO representative when creating the monitoring plan. If the time-frame in the indicator does not align to the quarter, still provide the results to that point and include your assessment of whether that is on track to meet the larger target or not.

This section of the quarterly report combines Sections VI and VII from the monitoring plan, Results Monitoring, and Monitoring for Unintended Results, respectively. The final question in this section is about any unintended program results, positive or negative. The monitoring plan, building on the risk analysis from your proposal, emphasizes scanning for unintended results that might indicate the program is inadvertently causing harm – and any such results should certainly be reported here. If you have unintended positive results, you may also include those. In addition to describing the result itself, please discuss its significance and your response. For example, a local mediation program might give additional status to the mediators. An unintended result might be that some of them use that power to settle personal scores. In discussing the significance of this, note the instances in which this happened (which can be anecdotal), what impact that had on the community and/or the individuals with whom they had the disagreements, and what impact it is having on the program, such as eroding popular support for it. Then summarize the steps you have taken or will take to address this. This section is an important input when synthesizing monitoring data and deciding if the program needs adjusting.

Section VI: Other Information

In this final section, we invite you to report other information you would like us to know. If you are monitoring fundamental assumptions, include that information here. If there is additional support you would like CSO to provide, such as arranging a U.S. government visit to raise a program's profile, assistance de-conflicting with another donor's program plans, reviewing training curriculum, or participating in a review panel for a small grant component of the program, please let us know. You may also include any other information you wish to report. Like the "other evidence" column in the results section, this is another place to capture anecdotes or examples of the program's impact that are not otherwise captured. You may wish to include illustrative examples of patterns reflected in the monitoring data. In some cases, you may be monitoring more than CSO asked you to monitor and wish to highlight some of those findings here. There is no need to write anything in this section, however.

Section VII: Monitoring Plan Review

Monitoring plans are living documents and should be updated as needed. We ask that, at least quarterly, you formally review your monitoring plan to determine if it needs to be updated. The two most common reasons it would need to be updated are: (1) you and CSO have agreed to adjust the program design in some way; and/or (2) you and/or CSO realize the data you have been gathering is not exactly the data we need to make programmatic decision.

If you determine the monitoring plan needs to be updated, please use this space in the quarterly report to explain why a revision is needed and propose a timeline for completing it. If no updates are needed, simply state that.

This monitoring approach is part of CSO's commitment to gathering and analyzing monitoring information that serves decision making. As part of this effort, CSO is working with Besa's Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church.

Annex I: Glossary

Term	Definition
Baseline	A starting point assessed before a program starts that is used in comparison to understand magnitude of change.
Change	A difference, external to CSO and its implementing partner, that is significant to the target population.
Context monitoring	Tracks changes in the environment that should trigger a review of the program's logic. For example, are our desired changes still the most significant ones? Is the way we expect change to unfold still the same? Are there new risks or opportunities to which the program should adjust?
Contextual assumption	Those factors directly pertinent to the program that must remain the same for the program's logic to remain valid.
Data	Quantitative or qualitative information used to measure an indicator.
Evaluation	The Department of State defines evaluation as the "systematic collection and analysis of information about the characteristics and outcomes of programs, projects, and processes as a basis for judgments, to improve effectiveness, and/or inform decision-makers about current and future activities." Evaluation focuses on why change did or did not occur, as well as questions of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact.
Goal	The most significant change a program seeks to achieve. Note: goal is a term used during the design stage, when change is desired but not yet achieved. The most significant change a program actually achieves is its impact.
Impact	The most significant change actually achieved by the program. This includes those changes the program sought to achieve as well as any unintended results. It also includes second-order changes resulting from the program.
Implementation monitoring	Tracks how the engagement is running. Are activities being held at the right time? Involving enough and the right people to create the desired changes? Being run well and within budget?
Indicator	The specific aspect of an objective that will be measured to assess how much change has occurred. It must be specific enough to be readily and reliably measured. Put simply, it is information that signals a change has occurred.
Method	The means of acquiring data for an indicator, such as key informant interviews, surveys, focus groups, content analysis, expert panels, or direct observation.
Monitoring	The collection of real-time information on context, implementation, and results to inform programmatic decisions.

Term	Definition
Objective	The changes a program seeks to achieve to reach the goal. Like outcomes, objectives are usually envisioned in chains of early, middle, and high-level desired changes. Note: objective is a term used in the design stage when such changes are desired but not yet achieved. Once a change has been realized, that is called an outcome.
Outcome	Change that has occurred as a result of activities implemented. They usually occur in chains of early, middle, and high-level outcomes connecting an activity to eventual impact.
Output	The immediate deliverable resulting from an activity. They refer to the most immediate sets of accomplishments necessary, but not sufficient, to produce outcomes and impacts. Outputs are a result but not a change.
Participant target	The qualities of those you must engage in the program activities for the desired changes to unfold.
Performance standard	An articulation of what constitutes quality work by those implementing the activity.
Relevance	Degree to which a program addresses key issues identified in the conflict analysis.
Results	Outputs, outcomes, impact. Any product or change that occurs due to the program activities.
SMART indicators	• *Specific:* there is a clear degree of change intended to occur within a stated population; • *Measurable:* there is only one change in the indicator and it is feasible to collect data on this factor in a reasonable amount of time and cost-effective manner; • *Accurate:* is a direct signal of the change, which is often context-specific; • *Reliable:* different people would all draw a similar conclusion through data collection and/or interpretation of the language. So, no jargon without definitions; and • *Time-bound:* includes a timeframe.
Target	The amount of change expected on an indicator within a specified timeframe. (Also see participant target.)
Theory of change	The activities and objectives leading to your desired goal and the casual and contextual assumptions on which that logic rests. The TOC should draw on current knowledge about how such changes unfold, adapted to the context.

Note: The terms goal and objective are used during the design stage of a program, when results are *intended* or *desired* results. When discussing actual results, usually in the implementation and monitoring stages of a program, impact and outcome replace goal and objective, respectively.

Annex II: Monitoring Plan Template

Section I: Grant Information

Please complete the chart below.

Program Name	
Program Implementing Partner	
Grant Award Number	
Program Period of Performance (start date & length)	
Program Location	
Total Program Budget	
Program M&E Budget	
Implementing Partner M&E POC	
Implementing Partner Field Team M&E POC	
Standing Implementing Partner-CSO Communication Mechanisms	

Please include the current TOC. (A TOC includes activities and objectives leading to your desired goal and the casual and contextual assumptions on which that logic rests.)

Section II: Monitoring Plan Review

Please submit any significant updates to the monitoring plan along with your quarterly reports by the following dates:

- [CSO to provide dates based on start time and duration of each grant.]

Section III: Decisions Monitoring Supports

Please list the decisions you will make that are informed by monitoring data. If there are dates the decisions must be made, include those. If CSO has specific decisions we hope the monitoring will inform, we will provide you with those.

Decisions	**Date (if applicable)**
1.	
2.	
3.	

Section IV: Context Monitoring

1. *Please complete the chart below:*

Factors in Context to Monitor	**Means of Monitoring**

Section V: Implementation Monitoring

1. *Complete* relevant sections *of the below chart for activities from your work plan you intend to monitor. How will you monitor each of the above program implementation elements? Please describe what you will monitor, the types of evidence you will use, who will collect the data, and how you will analyze it.*

Activity	**Rationale for Monitoring**	**Intended Output & Explanation**	**Participant Target**	**Performance Standard & Source**

Section VI: Results Monitoring

1. *Which are the most important outcomes to monitor to inform the decisions in Section III? Why those? What will you use to track them?*

Intended Outcome	**Rationale for Monitoring**	**Indicator**

2. *Please complete the following for each indicator. For self-evident results, complete just the relevant sections below.*

Indicator: **(Goal/objective:)**	
Common answers:	
What is the data collection method?	
Into what categories will you disaggregate the data?	
What is the data source?	
If appropriate, what is the location of the data source?	
If appropriate, what sampling means will you use?	
How will you store the data?	
Who will collect the data?	
When will s/he collect the data? Include approximate dates for the baseline and subsequent measurement.	
How will you analyze the data?	
Who will analyze the data?	
Who will communicate analysis of the data to decision makers?	
When?	
How will you communicate monitoring information to CSO?	We will communicate information via the quarterly reports except when the results are time-sensitive, in which case we will communicate that via email.

3. *Please provide a copy of any data collection tools, or the dates by which you plan to submit them.*

Section VII: Monitoring for Unintentional Results

1. *Please note any parts of the program where monitoring for unintentional results is warranted.*

2. *How will you monitor for unintentional results?*

Section VIII: Fundamental Assumption Monitoring

1. *What, if any, fundamental assumptions within the TOC will you monitor?*

2. *For fundamental assumptions you choose to monitor that require indicators, please complete the below. Otherwise, explain why indicators are not necessary and how you will monitor the fundamental assumption.*

Indicator: **(Fundamental assumption:)**	
What is the data collection method?	
Into what categories will you disaggregate the data?	
What is the data source?	
If appropriate, what is the location of the data source?	
If appropriate, what sampling means will you use?	
How will you store the data?	
Who will collect the data?	
When will s/he collect the data? Include approximate dates for the baseline and subsequent measurement.	
How will you analyze the data?	
Who will analyze the data?	
Who will communicate analysis of the data to decision makers?	
When?	
How will you communicate monitoring information to CSO?	We will communicate information via the quarterly reports except when the results are time-sensitive, in which case we will communicate that via email.

Annex III: Quarterly Report Template

Section I: Grant Information

Please complete the below.

Program Name	
Program Implementing Partner	
Grant Award Number	
Program Period of Performance (start date & length)	
Program Location	
Total Program Budget	
Program M&E Budget	
Implementing Partner M&E POCs (including field team)	
Program Goal and Objectives as of Quarterly Report Date	

Section II: Monitoring Synthesis

Please tell us if you are continuing program management as previously planned or adapting and why. If additional support from CSO would be useful, please include that.

Section III: Context Monitoring

1. *Please complete the below.*

Factor to Monitor	**Is the Contextual Assumption Still Valid? How do you know?**	**Proposed Changes to Accommodate**

Section IV: Implementation Monitoring

1. *For those activities you indicated you would monitor, please complete the following.*

Activity to Have Completed this Quarter	**Intended Completion Date/ Milestone**	**Actual Completion Date/ Milestone**	**Intended Quarterly Output**	**Actual Quarterly Output**	**Intended Output to Date**	**Actual Output to Date**	**Intended Target Participant**	**Actual Participants**

2. *To what extent did activity execution align to the intended performance standard? Please summarize the evidence upon which you're basing this conclusion.*

3. *If there were any discrepancies of significance between intended and actuals (for timelines, budget, outputs, target participants, and/or performance standards), please explain why the discrepancy occurred, what, if any, operational implication it had, and any plans you have to address the discrepancy.*

4. *Were there any changes to your key personnel?*

Sections V: Results Monitoring

1. *Please complete the following:*

Intended Outcome	SMART Indicator	Baseline	Quarter's Target	Achieved this Quarter	Target to Date	Achieved to Date	Other Evidence

2. *If there were any discrepancies of significance between intended and actuals, please explain why the discrepancy occurred and what, if any, operational implication it had.*

3. *What, if any, unintended results (positive and negative) occurred this quarter? What is the significance of the result(s)?*

Section VI: Other Information

1. *Is there any other information you wish to report?*

2. *What additional support, if any, would be useful from CSO?*

Section VII: Monitoring Plan Review

1. *Does the monitoring plan need to be updated? Please explain any need for an updated monitoring plan and propose a timeline for completing the update.*